

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

Saturday, January 26, 2008

9:00 a.m.

Mayor Wright called the Newington Town Council Special Meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. in a Meeting Room at the Indian Hill Country Club, 111 Golf Street, Newington.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present

Councilor Banach
Councilor Boni
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Bowen
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nagle
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Also Present:

John L. Salomone, Town Manager
Ann Harter, Director of Finance
Ed Meehan, Town Planner
Richard Mulhall, Chief of Police
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION -- ON AGENDA - None

IV CONSIDERATION OF NEW BUSINESS

A Introduction of Facilitator - Randi Frank, Randi Frank Consulting, LLC

Mr. Salomone gave brief opening remarks and introduced Ms. Frank. Ms. Frank had previously served as Assistant Town Manager in Cheshire and Rocky Hill and is very familiar with municipal government operations through her previous positions and her consulting business.

B Public Safety Overview – Chief Richard Mulhall

Chief Mulhall provided a brief statistical overview of crime and other activities in Newington and how Newington compared to selected other towns in Connecticut. There has been a 69% increase in Part 1 (Major) Crime in the past six years; in 2006-07 the increase was 15.1%. Grant money has enabled more enforcement activity on the Berlin Turnpike which helped move crime out of town, but now cities have changed their policing tactics with a dramatic decrease in crime in the cities and a shifting back to Newington. Contributing factors are the commercial nature of the Berlin Turnpike and Newington's location between Hartford and New Britain and easier accessibility due to the highway system. Chief Mulhall also gave a brief overview of the organizational structure of the department, staffing and comparisons to other towns. Trends show a general increase in crime throughout the town; calls for service are rising and the nature of the calls is changing requiring two officers at a scene more often; a decrease in motor vehicle stops due to workloads in other areas; patrol officers are conducting more follow-up investigation due to the workload of the Detective Division. There was discussion regarding overtime pay and a decision in the past to pay OT rather than hire more full-time personnel. Some officers work 60-80 hours/week. There is a contractual minimum staffing plan which the department cannot go below. There are 24 shifts to fill, but if anyone takes any time off, the slot must be filled with OT based on contractual

obligations. Beginning in 2006-07, the addition of more staff has helped reduce OT. The five-year plan calls for the addition of three more officers.

C. Planning/Development Overview – Town Planner Ed Meehan

Town Planner Ed Meehan indicated that Newington's population is changing – it is going down and aging, which requires more medical calls and changes in service delivery. There is very little vacant land left in Newington – only about 12% of which only half is usable. Development consists primarily of recycling/redevelopment of existing properties. 500,000 sf of development was approved last year (only 40 acres of virgin land). Traffic continues to be a large problem as well as access issues and incoming people. He briefly described issues related to the proposed Cedar Mountain development projects, the Cedar Mountain ridgeline/open space grant, the privately owned 28 acre site/former Connecticut Children's Hospital property, the Municipal Parking Lot (missing one parcel)/expansion of the Town Center, traffic issues on Cedar Street, left turn lanes/Town Hall parking/access, the Alumni Road/Maple Hill/Cedar Street intersection, the former Crest Pontiac site, property owned by CCSU and privately owned parcels at Cedar/Fenn, the National Welding site, proposed development on Fenn Road, the Busway project, proposed widening of the bridge on Cedar Street by the DOT, acreage left at the Newington Business Park, the Mongello site on Fenn Road, development on the Berlin Turnpike near the Berlin townline, and possible areas which might be kept as open space.

D Financial Overview – Finance Director Ann Harter

Finance Director Ann Harter reported that 07-08 expenditures are on line, but the year is not yet over; revenue is on target, but the economy is slowing. Two of the Town's Top 10 taxpayers are not up to date, but are making partial payments. Building permits could slow down and investment income rate decrease. The Town's 08-09 budget in its current, very preliminary phase shows a 6% increase due to contractual obligations, health care costs, pension, fuel, CRRRA tip fee increase, energy costs, MDC and Board of Education (BOE) up. With regard to Capital Improvements/Debt, the CIP Committee provides a framework, prioritizes projects, integrates Town and BOE projects which are then coordinated with the annual operating budget. The question is whether to pay long term (borrow) or short term (pay as you go). The Debt Capacity Study suggests the Town should not have more than \$30,000,000 in debt which allows the Town to spend a total of \$6.3 million/year in capital projects (\$3.8 Debt Service and \$2.5 pay as you go). On the revenue side, when there is a downturn or recession, past experience is that the Town has lost income. Permits may go down, collections may go down. The Municipal Conveyance Tax is supposed to sunset this year (may cut income from this source in half). The Town's Fund Balance is at 11% (\$10.9 million). State funding is expected to increase slightly and there have been slow increases in ECS funds. A 1% increase in the Town's Grand List is great due to lack of growth potential in Newington. The Town's credit ratings are solid. The question is how changes will affect the Town on a long-term financial basis.

E General Overview of other Major Issues – Town Manager John Salomone

Mr. Salomone spoke on some of the main items contained in the CIP plan, the Downtown/Children's Hospital site, growth v. quality of life issues, increasing costs for personnel issues, Charter Revision, P&R Master Plan implementation, SRO Program, Joint Committee on Community Safety recommendations, senior housing. All of these will have an impact on the budget and the Town's ability to pay.

F. Break

G. Discussion / Set Goals and Priorities

Public Safety

Major themes identified: Staffing, Overtime, Retirements, Traffic

Priorities: Youth crime and drugs in schools (dogs). Transient population in motels on the Berlin Turnpike (regional housing) and revision of nuisance ordinance were also identified.

Planning/Development

Major themes identified: Traffic issues, Crest Pontiac site, Open Space, Age-restricted Housing, Fenn Road, Callahan Property, Downtown area, National Welding Site

Priorities: Traffic, specifically the realignment of Alumni/Maple, was identified as the number one priority, followed by clean up of the National Welding site - partnering with a developer for best use development, possibly offices or housing (housing could mean more costly clean up costs, traffic), Open Space considerations (Cedar Mountain Ridgeline) and the Downtown area/Hospital site.

Finance

Major themes identified: Credit Rating, CIP Funding Policy, Fund Balance (need a solid funding policy – don't over extend), Economy, Funding Priorities (staffing needs, need to fund quality of life/infrastructure), tax increase, traffic v. growth v. tax revenue, Coordination of Services (BOE/Town, regional, Highway/Parks & Grounds into Public Works, Subcontracting Options, Roads (CIP v. pay as you go), Age-restricted, Affordable Housing/New Samaritan/Small Cities grant.

Priorities: Coordination of services and senior housing were identified as major priorities.

Other

Other items mentioned were State control of roads and property, water back-up, CRRRA issue.

V PUBLIC PARTICIPATION -- ON AGENDA - There was none.

VI REMARKS BY COUNCILORS - There was none.

VII ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the Special Meeting was made by Councilor Bowen at 1:05 p.m., seconded by Councilor Lenares. Motion carried 9-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Verreault
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Goals 2008

Funding

3% tax increase cap

Public Safety

Police Department staffing – phase in
Motel Crime (research issue/draft nuisance ordinance)
Youth Crime
Narcotics in Schools (use of dogs)

Planning/Development

Traffic / enforcement
Alumni Road/Maple Hill Realignment
National Welding Site / development of whole Cedar/Fenn/Alumni area
Open Space (Cedar Mountain ridgeline)

Finance

Coordination of Services
Senior Housing